

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Grand Central Terminal

AND/OR COMMON

Grand Central Terminal

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER 71-105 East 42nd Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

VICINITY OF  
CODE

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

18th

STATE

New York

COUNTY

New York

CODE

36

**3 CLASSIFICATION****CATEGORY**☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT**OWNERSHIP**☐ PUBLIC☒ PRIVATE☐ BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS**☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE**☐ YES: RESTRICTED☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO**PRESENT USE**☐ AGRICULTURE☒ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☐ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☒ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Pennsylvania Central Transportation Company

STREET &amp; NUMBER

466 Lexington Avenue

CITY, TOWN

New York

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

New York County Hall of Records

STREET &amp; NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

New York City Landmarks Commission

DATE

1967

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☒ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

305 Broadway

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT  
☒ GOOD  
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED  
☐ RUINS  
☐ UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED  
☒ ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

A complete contemporary description would be lengthy--in the brief:

"The terminal has two levels. The upper one of these, 20 ft. below the street, is 46.4 acres in area and has 19.5 miles of track. There are 42 tracks, and 29 of these are adjacent to platforms for a total distance of 28,850 ft. The lower or suburban level, about 44 ft. below the street, has 14.1 miles of track and an area of 32.8 acres. Its tracks are 25 in number, a total distance of 13,000 feet. The station building proper fronts on 42nd Street at Park Avenue and extends back to 45th Street. It is a truly massive structure, 673 ft. long, 301 ft. wide, with seven stories but with provision for 13. The base and lower portion of the edifice are of Stony Creek granite with Bedford limestone above. Fronting on 42nd Street there are three large arched windows, surrounded by massive pillars and surmounted by a large statuary group about a clock. The principal entrances to the station are four in number. They are situated as follows: at the corner of 42nd Street and Vanderbilt Avenue; at the southeast corner of the station on Depew Place; in the center of the front opposite Park Avenue; and from the subway. There are also entrances from 43rd Street on Depew Place and Vanderbilt Avenue, the former entering the main concourse directly and the latter by the gallery. Entering the station from the center entrance on the 42nd Street front passes through a short vestibule and down a ramp to the main waiting room, 65 ft. by 205 ft. in size and 3 1/2 ft. below the street. This room is finished in buff stone and marble. It has an artistic beamed ceiling lighted by five large lamps.

The express train concourse, north of the main waiting room is 287 ft. long, 120 ft. wide and 125 ft. high at its highest point; it has further extensions under the gallery at the east end of 105 ft. and under the gallery and street on the opposite side of 55 ft. It is finished in Botticino marble and buff-tinted stone, and light is supplied by day through three large arched windows facing on Depew Place and one on Vanderbilt Avenue.

The room, as handsome as it is by day, is better still by night. It is then that the arched turquoise-blue ceiling shows at its best. Upon the latter is depicted that section of the heavens seen from October to March or from Aquarius to Cancer. All the stars and

(CONTINUED)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES	1903-1913	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Warren and Wetmore Reed and Stem
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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Grand Central Terminal is one of the great examples of urban design in America and is a engineering and architectural triumph as well. Currently under repair this New York landmark is not only a station, it is a monument containing its own "city." This railroad complex is the greatest head station remaining in the Nation.

A recent study (1974) published by the New York State Parks and Recreation, Division of Historic Preservation prepared by James M. Fitch and Diana S. Waite gives a complete history:

"The present Grand Central Terminal stands on a site which has been occupied by a series of railroad stations for just over a century. Cornelius Vanderbilt, the railroad tycoon, was authorized by the State of New York to erect a new station on the grounds in May of 1869; construction began that same year and the new station was opened two years later.

Manhattan Island had been connected to the mainland since the 1830's by the New York and Harlem Railroad and the New York and New Haven Railroad, whose lines ran down Fourth Avenue to a terminal at 26th Street, and by the Hudson River Railroad from Albany, whose tracks ran down the Hudson River waterfront to a terminus at Tenth Avenue and 30th Street. But the conflict between the surface tracks of these railroads and the life of the city was continuous and increasing. The reasons were many: the danger of grade-level crossings to pedestrians and horse-drawn traffic; the nuisance of noise, dirt and fire (sparks from the wood-burning locomotives were a constant hazard); and the general depression of real estate values along the rights-of-way. In 1857, the city had banned the use of

(CONTINUED)

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 3 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	8
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5	8	6	4	0	0
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4	5	1	1	6	0	0
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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B 

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Manhattan Tax map block 1280, Lot one. Beginning at northeast corner of East 42nd Street and Vanderbilt Avenue running east along East 42nd Street for 394.4 ft. east; proceed north along Depew Place 340.4 ft. north bound; proceed west for 394.4 ft. to Vanderbilt Avenue west boundary; proceed south 340.4 ft. along Vanderbilt Avenue to East 42nd Street.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
-------	------	--------	------

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

DATE

8/11/76

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

STATE

D.C. 20240

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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Grand Central Terminal

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constellations appear in proper order and of the stars in the greater constellations no less than 63 are lights.

In the center of the concourse is an octagonal counter, the information bureau, surmounted by an illuminated clock with four faces. On the right and left as one enters from the waiting room are the ticket offices respectively of the Pennsylvania Central, each having 14 windows on the concourse. On the east side of the room there is a baggage counter. About the room on three sides there is a gallery with a wide stairway on the Vanderbilt Avenue side leading down into the concourse.

Below the express concourse there is a similar facility for suburban patrons. This room is 70 ft. wide and like its counterpart upstairs has an information room in its center and ticket offices on one side, these facilities being in each case directly below the similar facilities above and connected with them by spiral stairways."<sup>5</sup>

The two concourse approaches are arcades--originally stores were installed and some have today become shabby but there is still a great deal of commercial activity in the terminal.

Fitch and Waite continue:

"Structurally, the complex is conventional. Such below-grade features as the tunnels, footings, foundations for skyscrapers and ramped platforms display first-rate expertise in engineering. The above-grade structure employs a steel frame unexceptionable for its day (the Pennsylvania Station concourse was far more spectacular, if only because the steel frame was exposed to view.) Perhaps the most advanced structural elements in the whole complex are the series of thin shallow terra cotta vaults erected in the below-grade Oyster Bar by Raphael

<sup>5</sup> Droege, John A. Passenger Terminals and Trains. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1916, pp. 163-169.

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Guastavino. Externally, this frame was sheathed with granite at street level and with limestone above. Internally, the surfaces were blond marbles, Caen stone (simulated), travertine and painted plaster--all in all, a pleasant unobtrusive polychromy offset by bronze and gilt chandeliers.

In terms of mechanical systems, the Terminal has some remarkably advanced features. With most of its public spaces either totally enclosed or totally below ground, the designers faced unprecedented problems in environmental control. Electric traction had made the whole scheme possible by eliminating smoke, gases, and fire. But serious problems of heating and ventilation were also solved. (Although summer air-conditioning would be considered mandatory today, it was not technically feasible then.) A totality new scale of electric lighting was called for, while the sheer scale of the complex demanded the application of electricity to other equipment. Thus the Terminal showed a wide and imaginative use of new communication devices; elevators to move passengers and freight pneumatic tubes to circulate tickets and baggage checks, and what was regarded as the most advanced electric signal system in the world. All such problems, and many like them, were solved at a level so high in 1914 as to remain acceptable more than half a century later."<sup>6</sup>

There have been alterations and changes both to the interior and exterior but it remains intact as Pennsylvania Station does not--a tribute to a small but determined group of dedicated preservationists.

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<sup>6</sup> Fitch, James M. and Waite, Diana. pp. 6.

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steam locomotives south of 42nd Street, forcing the railroads to uncouple the cars and tow them down to the depot by horses. All of these factors were to force the railways to pull back their terminals to the north. Ultimately, they would compel them to place their trackage either above or below grade.

Commodore Vanderbilt's decision to build a "Grand Central Depot"--the very terminology is redolent of the times--was opportune, the more so since, having recently acquired financial control of all the roads, he was able to consolidate them physically as well.

The site of the proposed depot was already occupied by railroad buildings: an 1859 map indicates that already along Fourth Avenue, between 42nd and 44th Streets, there were two locomotive houses, a depot, a car house, stables and "shoeing shop" for the horses which had pulled the cars down to Madison Square. Now Vanderbilt acquired additional property for storage and marshalling yards between Madison and Lexington running as far north as 48th Street. By these far-sighted additions practically all of the present ground area of the present-day complex was acquired. The first foundation stone was laid on September 1, 1869, and the station was completed by October, 1871.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fitch, James M. and Waite, Diana. New York State Parks and Recreation Department, 1974, pp. 1-2.

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The growth of the city, the need for underground tunnels for safety and cleaner air along with expanding services obsoleted the old depot by the end of the century. Competition from both the Pennsylvania Railroad building a new depot and the New York Subway System forced the New York Central to embark on the great project.

"On March 19, 1903, William G. Wilgus (by then vice-president of the New York Central) was able to present his scheme for a new station to the president of the railroad. In its essential features this project, to be called the Grand Central Terminal, solved all the major problems confronting the line--and solved them in a manner so advanced that, two-thirds of a century later, the Terminal is still entirely viable. Wilgus's initial proposal covered all the main features, though not all of the detailed refinements, of the completed Terminal."<sup>2</sup>

Included in the plan were submergence of all tracks from 97th Street south, two track levels for commuter and long distance trains, ramps for passengers instead of stairs, the development of Park Avenue and easy passenger access to it and the utilization of air rights over the terminal--one of the first uses of this principle.

"History was to prove this an epochal scheme. What seems so impressive about it in retrospect is the fact that, after decades of backing and filling, improvisation and make-do, so truly comprehensive a scheme was adopted. As the new Town Planning Review of Liverpool was quick to recognize in an early issue, the solution was a broadly urbanistic, not a narrowly architectural, one. It was to convert the Terminal complex from an inert obstacle to urban development into a dynamic reciprocating engine for urban activity.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid pp. 3.

(CONTINUED)



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Following the acceptance of the Wilgus report, plans for the new Terminal were requested on a competitive basis from a selected list of architectural firms. As is often the case in such big commissions, other factors than sheer professional ability seem to have played a large role in the final selection of the architects. Four firms were initially invited to participate: Daniel H. Burnham; McKim, Meade and White; Samuel Huckel; and Reed and Stem. (The very selection seems arbitrary, since the first two firms were internationally famous for their work on the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893, while the other two were relatively unknown.) The design of Reed and Stem was accepted, nominally because it called for an elevated driveway around the Terminal but the fact that Charles A. Reed was Wilgus's brother-in-law may have played some role in the selection. Such familial connections certainly seem to have been a factor subsequently, for a firm hitherto not mentioned unexpectedly submitted another design for the Terminal without Reed and Stem's knowledge. The firm was Warren and Wetmore, whose senior member, Whitney Warren, was a cousin of William K. Vanderbilt, the then Chairman of the Board of the New York Central."<sup>3</sup>

The final partnership was headed by Charles A. Reed, but at his death in 1911, Whitney Warren took over the association.

"Construction of the new Terminal was actually to take almost ten years--from June, 1903, to February, 1913. The slow pace is easy enough to understand, since uninterrupted service had to be maintained throughout the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid pp. 4.

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entire period and it had already increased in volume from 500 trains per day in 1903 to over 600 in 1906.... on February 2, 1913 the terminal was formally opened to the public.

Although the completed building consists of hundreds of different specialized facilities at many levels of its complex plan, its central feature--a system of public spaces for handling incoming and departing passengers--was and still is a model of coherence and clarity. This clarity had both its formal and its functional aspects. In a florid statement at the time of the opening, Whitney Warren (by now the architect of the Terminal) employed an analogy popular with "City Beautiful" planners:

Modern cities have no portals or arches of triumph. Their real gateways are the railroad stations, and the motive of the facade of this terminal is an attempt to offer a tribute to commerce. The monumental group decorating the three great Mercury, supported by moral and mental energy--Hercules and Minerva (sculptor: Jules Coutan).

But "gateway" is a totally inadequate term, suggesting a passive orifice under the open sky whereas the Terminal must be seen as a mechanism, a great reciprocating engine for pumping a huge flow of pedestrian traffic through a whole series of valves and conduits into connecting systems--trains, subways, taxis, trolleys and elevated trains.....but the enormous impact of the Terminal is due to the Main Concourse. This great chamber, 120 by 375 feet, with a vault 125 feet high at its apex, was one of the noblest in America--suprassed only by the great glass and metal vaults of the now-vanished Pennsylvania Station. Sheathed in marble and simulated Caen stone, its elliptical vault colored cerulean with constellations painted by Paul Helleu, the Concourse was dramatically

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illuminated by the great windows at each end and the clerestory lunettes along each side.

The visual splendor of this chamber and its ancillaries--the waiting room, the lower Concourse with its famous Oyster Bar, the mezzanine balconies and the vaulted Grand Central Art Galleries--was fully matched by unprecedented amenities and conveniences. Long before its opening, the architectural and urbanistic significance of these had been noted by the Town Planning Review of Liverpool. Hailing it as "the greatest railway terminal in the world...."

Stylistically, the Grand Central Terminal was notable for its consistency and--considering the idiom it employs--remarkable for its sobriety and simplicity. The idiom was that of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and was characterized by rationality in plan but flamboyance in elevation and ornament. Whitney Warren, who had studied there for the decade 1884-1894, obviously brought this experience to bear on the final form of the Terminal; but while the plan is clearly Beaux Arts in origin, the elevations show the style's exuberance only in such details as the sculptural group around the great clock on the south front."<sup>4</sup>

The complex as it finally evolved did make Park Avenue one of the most elegant boulevards in America, it created a hotel district and in an ironic way created the density of office towers that now crowd around it. Grand Central Terminal remains in spite of attempts to mutilate or destroy it a milestone in American architecture and engineering.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid pp. 5.

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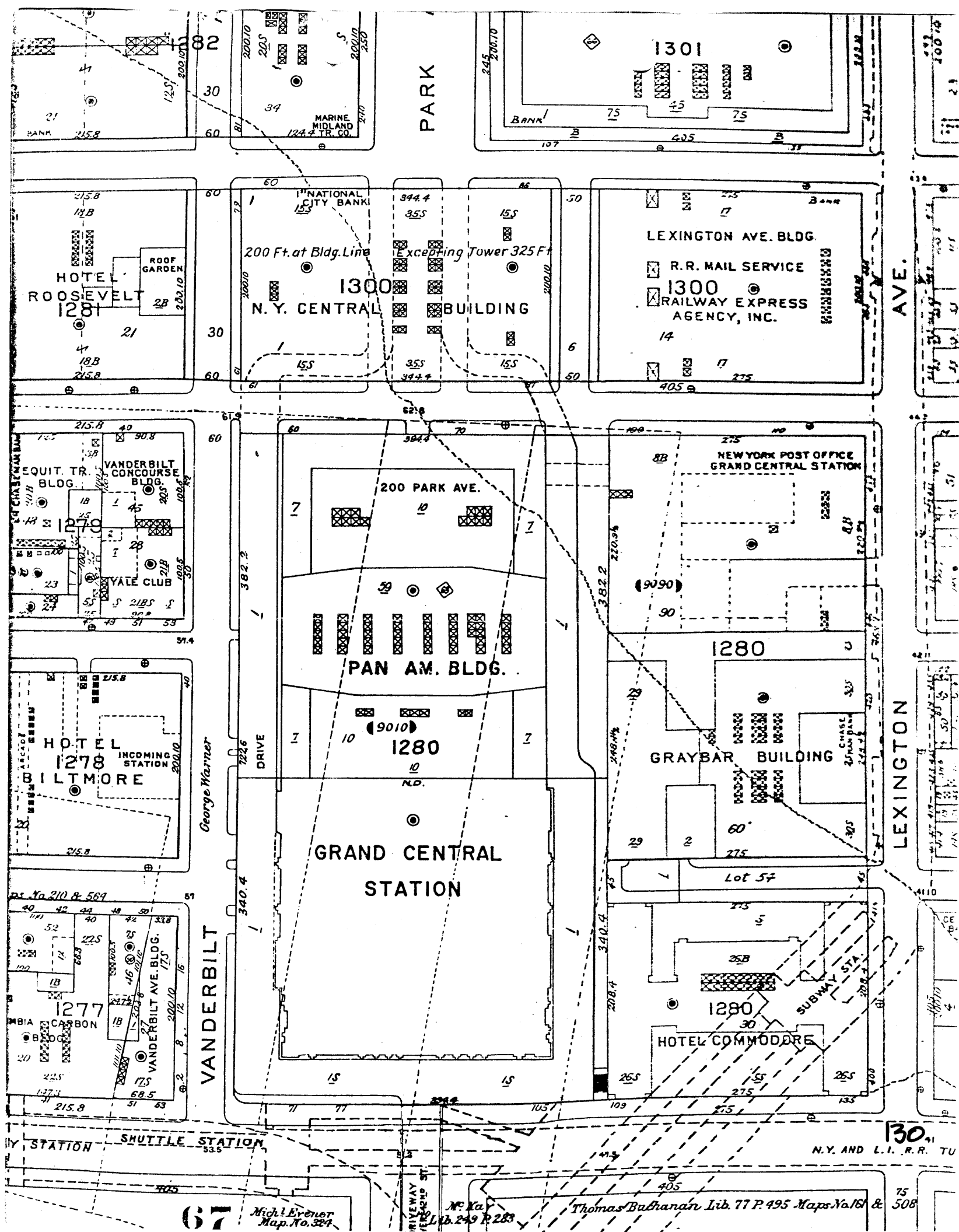
PAGE

Photographs and Their Descriptions

Location: Grand Central Terminal, New York, New York

Photo credit: New York Landmarks Commission

- Photo description:
1. Facade, Lexington Avenue.
  2. 42nd St. facade (northeast).
  3. Facade, Lexington Avenue.
  4. Facade sculpture. Mercury by Jules Coutan.
  5. Facade detail.
  6. Sculpture of Cornelius Vanderbilt.
  7. Detail light standard.
  8. Interior waiting room.
  9. Interior main hall.
  10. Main concourse.



PARK

1301

HOTEL  
ROOSEVELT  
1281

200 Ft. at Bldg. Line  
N.Y. CENTRAL BUILDING  
1300  
Excepting Tower 325 Ft.

LEXINGTON AVE. BLDG.  
R.R. MAIL SERVICE  
1300  
RAILWAY EXPRESS  
AGENCY, INC.

AVE.

EQUIT. TR. BLDG.  
VANDERBILT CONCOURSE BLDG.  
YALE CLUB  
HOTEL BILTMORE  
1278  
INCOMING STATION

200 PARK AVE.  
PAN AM. BLDG.  
1280

NEW YORK POST OFFICE  
GRAND CENTRAL STATION  
GRAYBAR BUILDING  
1280

LEXINGTON

HOTEL BILTMORE  
1278  
INCOMING STATION

GRAND CENTRAL STATION

GRAYBAR BUILDING  
1280

VANDERBILT AVE. BLDG.  
1277  
VANDERBILT

HOTEL COMMODORE  
1280  
SUBWAY STA.

# NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

## GRAND CENTRAL OYSTER BAR & RESTAURANT

Page 1

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

### 1. NAME OF PROPERTY

\* Additional Documentation

Historic Name: GRAND CENTRAL OYSTER BAR & RESTAURANT

Other Name/Site Number: Grand Central Terminal Oyster Bar; Grand Central Station Oyster Bar

### 2. LOCATION

Street & Number: Grand Central Terminal,  
89<sup>th</sup> East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street

Not for publication: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town: New York

Vicinity: \_\_\_\_\_

State: NY County: NYC Code:061 Zip Code:10017

### 3. CLASSIFICATION

#### Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: \_\_\_\_\_

Public-State: \_\_\_\_\_

Public-Federal: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: \_\_\_\_\_

Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Structure: \_\_\_\_\_

Object: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Number of Resources within Property

##### Contributing

1

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1

##### Noncontributing

\_\_\_\_\_ buildings

\_\_\_\_\_ sites

\_\_\_\_\_ structures

\_\_\_\_\_ objects

0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: The Grand Central Terminal is already listed as a National Historic Landmark; this nomination is additional documentation to that nomination.

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:



**GRAND CENTRAL OYSTER BAR & RESTAURANT****Page 2**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official\_\_\_\_\_  
Date\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting or Other Official\_\_\_\_\_  
Date\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_\_ Entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Determined eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register\_\_\_\_ Determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register

\_\_\_\_ Removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: Commercial Sub: Restaurant

Current: Commercial Sub: Restaurant

**7. DESCRIPTION**

## ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:

## MATERIALS:

## Foundation:

Walls: travertine facing slabs and tiles

Roof: tiles

Floor: terra cotta tile, aggregate cement and wood

Other:

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**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.****Present Physical Appearance**

A physical description of the overall terminal is provided in the Grand Central Terminal National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form<sup>1</sup> and is not repeated here.

The Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant is located on the west end of the lower level or lower concourse level of the Terminal immediately under the original Main Waiting Room. The Oyster Bar & Restaurant can be divided into four public areas: the waiting area/lounge, restaurant or dining area, oyster bar/quick service counter area, and the saloon. Upon entering the oyster bar and restaurant from the main entrance the lounge area is directly ahead with a bar on the far left wall of an alcove. This area is separated from the rest of the establishment by a low wall surmounted by a brass rail. Just to the left of the lounge is the maitre d' podium behind which is a tank containing live lobsters. Immediately to the left of the entrance is a coat room and immediately to the right, a cashier stand. The restaurant area is to the far left and the oyster bar along the right alcove wall on the far right. Four elongated horseshoe-shaped, quick-service counters are located opposite the oyster bar. A dessert trolley is located along the lounge wall by the counter area. Both the counters and the oyster bar have stools for patrons. Continuing to the extreme far right is the saloon which is completely partitioned off from the rest of the open and non-partitioned public area. Separate spaces within the large open dining/lounge/counter/oyster bar areas are suggested by the vaulted ceiling which form alcove-like spaces. The kitchen area is behind the bar and counter service area. Narrow horizontal openings in the partition between the counter area and the kitchen provide food delivery to the servers. On the wall above this partition is a wood-frame clock. On the face of the clock in black letters is written "OYSTER BAR" above and "GRAND CENTRAL" below the clock hand dial eye. This clock is probably original to the establishment but must have been moved from a different location to this area after the 1997 fire. A second entrance to the establishment via a set of stairs to the saloon is available from the main concourse level just before the ramp down to the lower food court and Oyster Bar & Restaurant.

The entrance to the Oyster Bar & Restaurant from the ramp landing is through a set of three double glass doors set within a glass arched partition which runs from the floor to the ceiling. This allows one to see the interior of the eatery before actually entering. This glass partition and doors are replacements from the originals damaged in the 1997 fire.

Architecturally, the most impressive feature noticed immediately as one enters the establishment, is the shallow, five-vaulted ceiling which stretches from the end of the dining area to the entrance to the saloon. Each vault is separated by a much narrower non-vaulted arched ceiling section. The ceiling and upper walls are covered by a herring bone pattern of rectangular-shaped terra cotta tiles. The tiles vary in shades of tan. This combination of colors and curves presents a very appealing space of texture and pattern. The borders of the ceiling vaults are finished in square tiles which parallel the arch curves accenting the vaults. Strip lighting

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Pitts, "Grand Central Terminal National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form," 1976.

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outlining the perimeter of each ceiling vault accentuate these curves even further. The point at which four ceiling arches come together is supported by continuations of the vault curves into a four sided column which continues to the floor. The restaurant area is the most impressive section consisting of two large central ceiling vaults with half-size vaults on either side which form alcove-like nooks. The ceiling vaults were erected by Raphael Gustavino in 1912-13. The oyster bar is tucked under half-sized ceiling vaults opposite the full-size ceiling vaults over the counter service area. Similarly, the bar is tucked under a half-size ceiling vault on the opposite side. The partition between the saloon and the counter service area runs along the end of a central full size ceiling vault. The partition is made of vertical wooden varnished boards. A set of swinging half-door allows egress from one area to the other.

At the peak of each ceiling vault is a ceiling light or chandelier. Each fixture consists of a horizontal compass rose with vertical metal cut-outs of eight specific fishing boats arranged around it. Along the oyster bar ceiling the same motifs are present in two elongated overhead lighting fixtures. Instead of a compass rose the base of the fixture is stylistic cutout of waves. The vessel motifs represent the following types: the Grand Banks fishing schooner *Bluenose*; a generic British steam drifter; Maine sardine carrier *Grayling* (1915); generic American seiner; Chesapeake skipjack *E.C. Collier* (1910); generic Norwegian sealer; generic American troller; and the Chesapeake oyster buyboat *Wm. B. Tennison* (1889). On the walls of the lounge these same vessels are depicted on plaques with some interpretive information for each. Interestingly, the *E.C. Collier* is listed in the National Register and the *Wm. B. Tennison* is a designated National Historic Landmark. The chandeliers were installed after the 1997 fire. The original chandeliers were damaged and removed. Two original chandeliers still hang from the ceiling just outside the main entrance of the oyster bar and restaurant at the ramp landing. A ghost from where one of the original chandeliers hung is still visible around the present chandelier over the counter area nearest the saloon wall.

The floors are largely covered with orange terra cotta square tiles. However, in front of the oyster bar and between it and the counters is an narrow aggregate concrete floor which interrupts the terra cotta floor. At the lounge area the aggregate concrete pattern turns 90 degrees and runs toward the back of the lounge. The ceiling vaults and some of the upper walls where the ceiling vaults continue down along the sidewalls are covered with the same striated multi-colored tan tiles formed in a herring bone pattern as found on the ceiling.

Interior partition walls are of vertical varnished wood paneling. Exterior walls are covered with travertine slabs from what would approximate a chair molding height to the floor. The floors in the lounge and bar are wood. The ceiling arch with herring bone tile pattern and travertine slab wall coverings is continued into the hallway and ramps which lead to the main concourse floor of the terminal. The ramp immediately opposite the oyster bar is informally referred to as the "Oyster Bar Ramp." The terminal was the first building in the United States to use ramps instead of stairs.

On either side of the entrance area, corresponding to the end wall of the oyster bar near the cashier's stand and end wall of the dining room near the coat room, are identical and original fixed metal window casements with four sets of three-over-three-over-three panes. The present glass panes are enmeshed wire and probably replace original plain glass panes. The metal frame

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casings have a pediment on each side and a simple mantel-like lintel over the top. A wonderful large multi-pane arched metal window casement occupies the arch behind the oyster bar. It consists of 27 vertical panes along the base and two smaller sets of panes near the top of the window bay arch. The outer border of the window bay consists of a series of square openings with a circle pane in middle of each square. A serving window is located within this casement behind the oyster bar which opens onto the ramp leading from the lower concourse level to the main concourse level of the terminal. Here, carry-out orders are available from the oyster bar only, not the kitchen.

Because the terminal was constructed with most of its public spaces below ground level, environmental control was essential. The terminal was built before the advent of air conditioning so air circulation for heating and exhausting stale air was necessary. The vents for this ventilation system in the oyster bar and restaurant, as they are throughout the terminal, are very ornate and original, consisting of an ornate bronze grill covering surrounded by carved travertine with a floral pattern. There is one vent over the oyster bar and one vent over one of the side alcoves in the dinning area.

The saloon has a wooden floor, vertical wooden walls, and drop acoustic ceiling tiles. The walls are covered with maritime prints, and paintings. Overall, the saloon has a steakhouse look. A wine bar occupies nearly two entire walls of the saloon.

The wall at the extreme left end of the dining room, now covered with vertical wood paneling, reputedly once had a painted mural covering the wall. The mural is said to be located in upstate New York but the exact location is not known.<sup>2</sup>

An oil portrait of the owner, Jerome "Jerry" Brody, hangs on a ceiling partition below the edge of a side ceiling vault at the entrance to the lounge alcove. Brody also owns the Galagher Steakhouse in the theater district since 1927.

### **Historic Physical Appearance**

When the oyster bar and restaurant opened in 1913, it looked architecturally essentially as it does today. While the walls and ceilings are identical (most original) some details such as the chandeliers and original entrance doors have been replaced with non-contemporary ones. The restaurant originally was decorated with live palms and Persian carpets which gave it almost a Floridian look. The present strip lighting along the perimeter of the vaults was not present in 1913.

Everything from the furniture to wooden wall paneling in the dining, bar, counter service area and lounge is new, having been replaced after the 1997 fire. Some of the original ceiling and wall tiles were also replaced but most are original. The ornate bronze vent cover and ornate carved travertine wall slabs around the vents and the lower wall travertine slabs are original. The metal sash casement windows are original. The present furniture has a more modern look than

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Garvey interview by Ralph Eshelman, at Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant, April 10, 2001.

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the original 1913 fixtures. The original bar with its spittoons was located in the saloon. The interior of the saloon has no similarity to its 1913 original appearance.

Still, the impression one receives upon entering the space is spectacular. The restaurant no longer caters to the well-heeled traveler, but to all walks of life from businessmen in suits to the everyday tourist.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X  
Statewide:      Locally:     

Applicable National  
Register Criteria:

A X B      C X D     

Criteria Considerations  
(Exceptions):

A      B      C      D      E      F      G     

NHL Criteria:

1, 4

NHL Theme(s):

V. Developing the American Economy  
2. distribution and consumption

Areas of Significance:

Architecture  
Commerce  
Maritime History

Period(s) of Significance:

1913 to present

Significant Dates:

1913, 1997

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect:

Initially Reed and Stem (1903); then Warren (Whitney Warren) and Wetmore and Reed and Stem as "The Associated Architects of Grand Central Terminal" (1904).

Builder:

Raphael Gustavino

Historic Context:

XII. Business  
B. Manufacturing Organizations  
1. Food, Beverages, and Tobacco

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**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**

The 1913 Grand Oyster Bar and Restaurant is among the most famous oyster bars in the United States. Noted for its “pan oyster roasties” as well as its numerous varieties of fresh shucked oysters, the Grand Central Oyster Bar was frequented by the rich and famous as well as tourists and native New Yorkers. The likes of Lillian Russell and Diamond Jim Brady were once patrons; more recently, Mayor Ed Koch and New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan frequently eat here.

Grand Central Station, one of the great buildings of America, evokes a spirit that is unique in the City. It combines distinguished architecture with a brilliant engineering solution, wedded to one of the most fabulous railroad terminals of our time. Monumental in scale, this great building functions as well today as it did when built. In style it represents the best of the French Beaux Arts. (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, August 2, 1967)

Since the Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant opened its doors in 1913 it has become one of America’s most historic and celebrated seafood restaurants, renowned for its grand décor and spectacular raw bar.

**Consumption of Oysters**

When we hear or read the word oyster we typically think of food. An oyster is considered either a savory treat, not unlike chocolate or lobster, or a food demanding an acquired taste, such as snails or sushi. O.G. Carpenter, manager of the Long Island Oyster Growers Association, states that the oyster is

*the most tender and delicate of all sea foods . . . They never work or take any exercise. They are a dainty, easily digested morsel because their idling never builds any tough muscular tissues. They are free from sinewy, coarse grain fibers. They are moist and mellow to the palate.*<sup>3</sup>

Oysters are easily and quickly prepared in many ways, including raw, pickled, stewed, roasted, steamed, boiled, blanched, poached, grilled, fried, skewered, smoked, and scalloped. They are used in soups, bisques, gumbos, sauces, sausages, salads, omelets and scrambled eggs, fritters, patties, curries, pies, and puddings. Oyster meat is an excellent source of high-quality protein, minerals, and vitamins. Oysters are regarded by the National Heart and Lung Institute as a healthy food due to their low-cholesterol and high nutritional value.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hector Bolitho, *The Glorious Oyster* (New York, Horizon Press, Inc., 1961), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> National Consumer Educational Services Office, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, *Oysters* (Chicago, Illinois), p. 2.



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Oysters were a nineteenth-century fast food which could be obtained either raw or sometimes roasted by street venders. Street peddlers circulated throughout the larger cities of the United States, carrying containers of oysters in their hands, strung from shoulder yokes, or in push carts. Restaurants, bars, and saloons, even in cities of modest size, catered to the popularity of oysters, many incorporating the word "oyster" in their name.

The first known public serving of oysters in the American colonies occurred when a primitive saloon located in a cellar opened in New York City in 1763. For sit-down meals oysters were usually served in stews or roasted, fried or broiled. Union Oyster House was founded in Boston in 1826; Antoine's Restaurant, New Orleans, where the Oyster Rockefeller was concocted in 1899, dates from 1868; and the famed oyster bar at New York's Grand Central Terminal dates from 1913—all still operate today.

Oyster cellars (19th-century restaurants located below street level specializing in serving oysters) in New York City, Boston, and Providence became gathering places for politicians and social elite, not unlike the coffee houses of Europe. From the 1830s to the 1870s oyster bars enjoyed great popularity in New York City, which was nearly surrounded by rich oyster beds. Charles McKay, an English visitor, noted that this "gift of oysters" was most appreciated by New Yorkers. A red and white muslin stretched over a wire frame resembling a "balloon" was placed at the entrance to oyster bars and illuminated by a candle to announce when the oyster bar was open. In the 1840s customers selecting New York City's "Canal Street Plan," named for the numerous oyster bars located along this street and which specialized in a plan where one could eat all the oysters one wanted for a set price—about 6 cents. Those who became too greedy were slipped a bad oyster to curb their appetite. Other famous New York City oyster bars include Thomas Downing's on Broad Street and Florence's on Broadway. Oyster bars furnished pepper, lemons, mustard, and oil and vinegar to compliment the raw oysters. By the 1850s about \$6 million worth of oysters were consumed annually by New Yorkers. "Although the oyster eventually lost its prominent place in the cuisine of the city, the Grand Oyster Bar at Grand Central Terminal remained world-renowned into the 1990s."<sup>5</sup>

Raw oyster bars have long been gathering centers for connoisseurs of the oyster. In many parts of the world, holidays are traditionally celebrated with oysters. In much of the United States, particularly along the East Coast, Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners frequently include oysters.<sup>6</sup> An 1841 oyster supper is described as follows:

. . . it is usual to have all the various preparations of oysters, fried, stewed, broiled, roasted, raw and in patties. Potatoes mashed, and browned, are generally added. The roasted oysters are served in the shell, on very large dishes, and bought in "hot and hot", all the time, as they are generally eaten much faster than they can be cooked. Small buckets (usually of maple or stained wood, with brass hoops) placed on the floor, for the

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, "oyster bars," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 870-1.

<sup>6</sup> Robert H. Robinson, *The Illustrious Oyster Illustrated* (Georgetown, Delaware, The Shellfish Series, Sussex Prints, Inc, 1983), p. 81.

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purpose of receiving the shells, beside the chairs of the gentlemen; as the business of opening the oysters mostly devolves on them. At the right hand of each plate is placed a thick folded towel and an oyster knife, which is used only to open the shell . . . <sup>7</sup>

Plates, spoons, and forks specifically designed for serving and eating oysters became popular and are collectors items today. During the Victorian Age, U.S. President Rutherford B. Hays, in office from 1877 to 1881, commissioned oyster plates in his presidential china set. Steam- or gas-fired oyster stewers and steamers were commercially made and sold to restaurants and private homes.<sup>8</sup>

**Brief History of Grand Central Terminal** (summary by Fitch and Waite)<sup>9</sup>

The present Grand Central Terminal stands on a site which has been occupied by a series of railroad stations for just over a century. Cornelius Vanderbilt, the railroad tycoon, was authorized by the State of New York to erect a new station on the grounds in May of 1869; construction began that same year and the new station was opened two year later.

Manhattan Island had been connected to the mainland since the 1830's by the New York and Harlem Railroad and the New York and New Haven Railroad, whose lines ran down Fourth Avenue and 30<sup>th</sup> Street. But the conflict between the surface tracks of these railroads and the life of the city was continuous and increasing. The reasons were many: the danger of grade-level crossings to pedestrians and horse-drawn traffic; the nuisance of noise, dirt and fire (sparks from the wood burning locomotives were a constant hazard); and the general depression of real estate values along the rights-of-way. In 1857, the city had banned the use of steam locomotives south of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, forcing the railroads to uncouple the cars and tow them down to the depot by horses. All of these factors were to force the railways to pull back their terminals to the north. Ultimately, they would compel them to place their trackage either above or below grade.

Commodore Vanderbilt's decision to build a "Grand Central Depot"—the very terminology is redolent of the times—was opportune, the more so since, having recently acquired financial control of all the roads, he was able to consolidate them physically as well.

The site of the proposed depot was already occupied by railroad buildings: an 1859 map indicated that already along Fourth Avenue, between 42<sup>nd</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> Streets, there were two locomotive house, a depot, a car house, stable and "shoeing shop" for the horses which had pulled the cars down to Madison Square. Now Vanderbilt acquired additional

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<sup>7</sup> "City Dining: New York," *Gourmet* (April 1993), p. 240.

<sup>8</sup> Kochiss, pp. 37-39; and Jim Karsnitz and Vivian Karsnitz, *Oyster Plates* (Atglen, Pennsylvania, Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 1993), pp. 8-11 and 32. The oyster plates were designed by Theodore R. Davis, an artist employed by *Harper's Weekly* and made by the Haviland Company of France.

<sup>9</sup> James M. Fitch and Diana S. Waite, *Grand Central Terminal*, New York State Parks and Recreation, Division of Historic Preservation (1974).

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property for storage and marshaling yards between Madison and Lexington running as far north as 48<sup>th</sup> Street. By these far-sighted additions practically all of the present ground area of the present-day complex was acquired. The first foundation stone was laid on September 12, 1869, and the station was completed by October, 1871.

On March 19, 1903, William G. Wilgus (by then vice-president of the New York Central) was able to present his scheme for a new station to the president of the railroad. In its essential features this project, to be called the Grand Central Terminal, solved all the major problems confronting the line—and solved them in a manner so advanced that, two-thirds of a century later, the Terminal is still entirely viable. Wilgus's initial proposal covered all the main features, though not all of the detailed refinements, of the completed Terminal.<sup>10</sup>

Included in the plan was the tunneling of all tracks from 97<sup>th</sup> Street south, two track levels for commuter and long distance trains, and ramps for passengers instead of stairs.

Construction of the new Terminal was actually to take almost ten years—from June 1903, to February, 1913. The slow pace is easy enough to understand, since uninterrupted service had to be maintained throughout the entire period and it had already increased in volume from 500 trains per day in 1903 to over 600 in 1906...on February 2, 1913 the terminal was formally opened to the public.

Stylistically, the Grand Central Terminal was notable for its consistency and—considering the idiom it employs—remarkable for its sobriety and simplicity. The idiom was that of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and was characterized by rationality in plan but flamboyance in elevation and ornament. Whitney Warren, who had studied there for the decade 1884-1894, obviously brought this experience to bear on the final form of the Terminal; but while the plan is clearly Beaux Arts in origin, the elevations show the style's exuberance only in such details as the sculptural group around the great clock on the south front.<sup>11</sup>

The unfinished terminal officially opened at 12:01 a.m. on Sunday, February 2, 1913. More than 150,000 people visited the new terminal that day.

In the early days of westward train travel dinner service was not available. Those traveling overnight often ate at the train station before boarding. Well-heeled travelers could take a Turkish steam bath or hot shower to freshen up in private changing rooms located in the Terminal.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> James M. Fitch and Diana S. Waite, *Grand Central Terminal*, New York State Parks and Recreation, Division of Historic Preservation (1974), pp. 1-3.

<sup>11</sup> James M. Fitch and Diana S. Waite, *Grand Central Terminal*, New York State Parks and Recreation, Division of Historic Preservation (1974), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Shawn G. Kennedy, "Bringing Symmetry and Logic Back to 'New York's Living Room,'" *The New York Times Metro*, November 26, 1995, p. 41.

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**Threat and Then Renovation of Grand Central Terminal<sup>13</sup>**

By the early 1950s as post-war American transformed itself into a nation of suburbs and automobiles, revenues from long-distance rail travel were plummeting. At the same time the value of prime Midtown Manhattan real estate had risen dramatically. In 1954, the railroad resolved to make the most of its assets, commissioning plans to demolish Grand Central Terminal and replace it with a six million-square-foot office tower.

Nothing came of this plan. But in 1958, the railroad concluded negotiations to demolish the six-story office structure at the Terminal's rear and replace it with the 59-story Pan Am Building. Completed in 1963, the Pan Am Building sealed off Park Avenue. At the same time the interior of the terminal was being parceled out for billboards and commercial advertising, in an ongoing effort to increase revenues.

On August 2, 1967, New York City's recently established Landmarks Preservation Commission—formed in response to the demolition of Pennsylvania Station—designated Grand Central Terminal as a landmark, subject to the protection of law. However this did not insure the preservation of the Terminal when Penn Central, the resultant conglomerate of a merger between the New York Central and Pennsylvania Railroads, leased Grand Central Terminal to developer UGP Properties, Inc., in 1968. That same year, UGP proposed building a 55-story tower above the Terminal which would have preserved the facade but rendered it virtually invisible; as well as demolish the main waiting room and part of the main concourse. The Landmarks Preservation Commission refused to approve the design so a second proposal was submitted which would have saved the main concourse but demolish the facade. This plan was also rejected by the Commission.

Penn Central filed an \$8 million lawsuit against the City of New York, essentially challenging the validity of the city's landmarks law. Litigation lasted for nearly a decade. Former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was among a group of 300 passengers who rode a train from New York to Washington, D.C., where they met with Joan Mondale and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan at a press conference held at Union Station to support designation of the Grand Central Terminal as a National Historic Landmark.<sup>14</sup> The landmark designation was approved in December 1975. The Penn Central lawsuit went all the way to the United States Supreme Court, which on June 26, 1978, upheld New York's law in a decision written by Justice William J. Brennan for a six-three majority. These actions successfully saved the Terminal.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Taken largely from "Grand Central: Preserving a Landmark" and "Grand Central: The Renovation," <[www.historychannel.com/exhibits/grand/preserve](http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/grand/preserve)>. This section, while not specific to the Oyster Bar & Restaurant, is presented as an update to the original nomination which was prepared prior to this renovation.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Collins, "Riding the Rails for Grand Central," *Washington Post*, April 15, 1978.

<sup>15</sup> Randall W. Scott, "Grand Central Decision: Historic Landmark," *Washington Post*, July 22, 1978, p. E31; Paul Goldberger, "Office Tower Above Grand Central Barred by State Court of Appeals," *New York Times*, June 24, 1977; William Claiborne, "Grand Central Avoids Possible Demolition," *Washington Post*, December 18, 1975; Owen Moritz, "Grand Central Salvation? Terminal Gets U.S. Landmark Status," *New York Daily News*, February 17, 1975; and "Compensation for a Landmark Building in New York City Denied by High Court," *Wall Street Journal*, no date, copy in files of National Maritime Initiative, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

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While the Terminal has been saved from demolition it was suffering from decades of deferred maintenance. The roof leaked; stonework was chipping away; structural steel was rusted; pollution and dirt stained the surfaces; and commercial intrusions such as the Kodac sign and Newsweek clock blocked out natural light.

In 1983 Metro-North took over operation of the Terminal and began a systematic program of repairs and capital improvement including a \$4.5 million project to replace the leaking roof and skylights. In 1988 it commissioned a master revitalization plan. In April 1990, a \$425 million master plan for Grand Central Terminal was presented and adopted by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). The main waiting room was restored and inaugurated in 1992.

In 1994, MTA gained a long-term lease from American Premier Underwriters, Inc., successor to the Penn Central Corporation. MTA entered into an agreement with GCT Venture, Inc., to implement a comprehensive revitalization plan based on the master plan for the Terminal. Construction began in 1996 with the cleaning of the main concourse sky ceiling. This plan was culminated with the rededication of the Terminal in the fall of 1998. The renovation cost \$197 million dollars. More than 500,000 persons pass through the Terminal doors each day.

### **History of Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant**

Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant opened on Sunday morning, just after midnight, February 2, 1913. Ever since it has been among the most popular oyster bars and restaurants not only in New York City but in the United States. This long-lived acceptance of the restaurant, however, by the 1950s, was based more on its location at the Grand Central Terminal than on excellence. When the "long-haul" passenger train system declined, with it declined the terminal and the restaurant. By the 1960s the restaurant had become not much more than an "old coffee shop" and in 1972 went bankrupt. By this time the elegant original columns were painted aqua-marine over wall paper. The wall covering was yellow Cello-tex™ and the furniture upholstered yellow. The space remained empty until 1974 when Jerome Brody was approached by the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) to take it over. Brody was a good choice as he had successfully taken on "The Forum of the Twelve Caesars," "The Rainbow Room," "The Four Seasons," and "Galagher's." Brody and his wife Marlene toured the best-known seafood restaurants in Manhattan and the other metropolitan areas of New York City where he found them full of customers even when the cuisine was ordinary. In the same year he entered into a lease with MTA and embarked on recreating the "Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant." They brought in the best seafood they could obtain and tested recipes in their own kitchens.<sup>16</sup>

*Gourmet* states, "Banish thoughts of mannerly service and serenity when you descend into the lower reaches of Grand Central Terminal for the Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant, truly a spectacle at midday as a squad of men open shellfish nonstop, not only for grand icy platters but for creamy stews and "pan roasts." [Is this the end of the quote? Where is citation?] (This kind of shellfish feasting goes back at least two hundred years.) The variety of fish available and the

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Abrahamson (compiler and editor), *Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant Complete Cookbook*, New York, Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1997, p. ix-x.

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American white-wine listings verge on the encyclopedic.<sup>17</sup> Grand Central Oyster Bar has become well known not only for its fresh shucked oysters but also for its oyster pan roasts. With a seating capacity of 450 people, this popular eatery serves from 20 to 30 varieties of oysters daily; over five million are sold annually.<sup>18</sup>

Fresh oyster selections available March 1, 2001, included Belon (Blue Hill, Maine, the only place in the United States where this famous French oyster is cultivated), Blue Point (Long Island), Box Oyster (Long Island), Bras D'Or (Nova Scotia), Caraquet (New Brunswick), Cotuit (Cotuit Harbor, Nantucket, Massachusetts), Duck Island (Long Island), Bristol (Maine), Halifax (Nova Scotia), Moonstone (Rhode Island), Narragansett (Rhode Island), Otters Cover (Washington), Pearl Point, (Washington), and Wellfleet (Wellfleet Harbor, Cap Cod, Massachusetts). In addition the Oyster Bar cultivates its own oyster beds in Westport, Connecticut. Other varieties often on the menu include Malpwaue oysters shipped from Prince Edward Island, Canada, and Olympia oysters from Puget Sound.<sup>19</sup>

The Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant has always been well-known for its oyster stew. Their recipe for an individual serving is to take eight freshly opened oysters, two tablespoons of sweet butter, ¼ cup of oyster liquor, dash of celery salt, one teaspoon of Worcestershire, one ounce of clam juice, ½ teaspoon of paprika and place in the top part of a double boiler over boiling water (do not let the top part of the boiler pan touch the water below). Whisk briskly for about a minute until the oysters are just beginning to curl. Add a cup of half-and-half and continue stirring briskly, just to a boil—do not boil. Pour stew in soup plate and top with one table spoon of butter and sprinkle with paprika.<sup>20</sup>

Pan roasted oysters were often sold by street peddlers and in oyster saloons from at least the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. An early panned oyster recipe is as follows: "Put in a Sauce-pan, over the Fire, enough Butter to cover the Bottom when melted. When hot pour in one Quart of nice Oysters, shake the Pan until the Oysters curl. Serve hot on Toast. Some of the Liquor may be added to the Oysters in the Pan."<sup>21</sup> A mid 20<sup>th</sup> century recipe is as follows: "Place oysters in a shallow baking pan and pour over them a small quantity of oyster juice, but not sufficient to raise or float them. Place dish carefully in hot over (450°F) and just heat the oysters though. Be careful not to bake them. Moisten hot buttered toast with hot juice from oysters and serve oysters on toast."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "City Dining," *Gourmet*, April 1993, p. 240.

<sup>18</sup> Grand Central Oyster Bar and Restaurant web page <[www.oysterbarny.com](http://www.oysterbarny.com)>; Abrahamson claimed only 16 to 17 varieties in 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Abrahamson, p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> Abrahamson, p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> Old Maryland recipe from a Virginia cook book, reprinted in *Williamsburg Art of Cookery*, 1938, reprinted 1966; recipe probably from Virginia Cookery-Book compiled by Mary Stuart Smith, Harper, New York, 1885).

<sup>22</sup> Ruth Berolzheimer, *The American Woman's Cook Book*, Garden City Publishing Company, New York, 1947, p. 207.

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Finally a late 20<sup>th</sup> century recipe: "Preheat the oven to 400°F. Toast the bread. Cream the butter with lemon juice and spread on the toast. Cut each slice of the toast into four squares. Place an oyster in each square and sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Place the squares on a flat baking sheet and bake 5-6 minutes; only long enough to plump up oysters. The bread soaks up the lovely oyster liquor."<sup>23</sup>

The Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant recipe for an oyster pan roast is as follows: Place eight freshly opened oysters, two tablespoons of sweet butter, one tablespoon chili sauce, ¼ cup of oyster liquor, dash of celery salt, one teaspoon of Worcestershire, one ounce of clam juice, ½ teaspoon paprika and place in the top part of a double boiler over boiling water (do not let the top part of the boiler pan touch the water below). Whisk briskly and constantly for about one minute, until oysters are just beginning to curl. Add ½ cup of cream and continue stirring briskly. Do not boil. Pour pan roast into a soup plate over a slice of dry toast. Top with one tablespoon butter and sprinkle with paprika.<sup>24</sup> It is possible from these recipes that "pan" originally meant bread or "pain" as bread is used in each as well as by the Grand Central Oyster Bar.

A fire on June 29, 1997, began in a refrigerator unit in the kitchen at about 2:30 a.m. The kitchen was gutted and smoke damage was extensive. The Terminal was briefly evacuated. Fourteen people, nine firefighters, a police officer and four civilians, suffered minor injuries. Some of the ceiling and wall tiles were cracked or fell from the heat, but fortunately, most of the original wall and ceiling fabric was left intact. The saloon, separated by a partition and a closed door did not suffer any damage. Two weeks after the fire the saloon reopened; next, the counter service area and two months after the fire the entire establishment was open. A franchise is opening in downtown Kansas City's "Freight House" late summer 2001.<sup>25</sup>

Grand Central Oyster Bar & Restaurant is a popular eating place for the rich and famous. Former Mayor Ed Koch, and New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan frequently eat here. Lillian Russell and Diamond Jim Brady are known visitors. The head waiter, Señor Anthony Gil, in the 1940s collected autographs of the rich and famous who dined in the restaurant. Autographs included two Chief Justices, Hughes and Taft.<sup>26</sup> Charles Evans Hughes was the 11th chief justice of the United States; he also served as secretary of state, governor of the state of New York, and judge of the World Court. William Howard Taft was the 27th president of the United States and later (1921-30) the chief justice of the United States Supreme Court.

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<sup>23</sup> Marion Cunningham, *The Fannie Farmer Cookbook*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1990, 13<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 137.

<sup>24</sup> Abrahamson, p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> "Fire Guts Landmark Restaurant in N.Y.'s Grand Central Station, *Washington Post*, June 30, 1997; Michael Garvey interview by Ralph Eshelman, April 10, 2001; and Grand Central Oyster Bar and Restaurant web page [www.oysterbarny.com](http://www.oysterbarny.com).

<sup>26</sup> David Marshall, *Grand Central*, New York, Whittlesey House, McGraw Hill Book Corp., Inc., 1946 (second printing), p. 123.



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Another great restaurant owned by Abe Mendel, located in the old Grand Central Terminal, was also famous for its oyster bar. In the autumn of 1912 when the new Terminal was nearly finished he selected at auction a corner room for his new restaurant, later in the 1940s becoming the Gateway Restaurant. Mendel did not chose the area where the Oyster Bar & Restaurant is located, because it was largely out of sight of both the Main Concourse and the Waiting Room, and tucked below grade with hardly any window space. The Union News Company chose the site and immediately sought out the best oyster chef that could be found to compete with Mendel's restaurant. They found Viktor Yesensky, a Slovakian, who apprenticed in Paris and came to the United States in 1905. Viktor first worked in the kitchen of the famous old Hotel Reisenweber and after a few years took over the oyster bar at the Hotel Knickerbocker. He made the restaurant famous for the "best oyster stew on Braodway." When the Union News Company asked Viktor to work for their new Grand Central restaurant he agreed to a modest salary but a high commission. He retired from the Oyster Bar in 1946 with a very good pension after serving there for 33 years. Vikto left Nick Rossetos, a Greek, as were most of the other oyster bar workers, in charge. Nick was proud of the oyster bar and proclaimed no other oyster bar even approached his. He claimed to serve 1,500 customers a day, who consumed around 25,000 oysters daily during the winter months. Clams were the principal seafood in the summer months; as many as 45,000 clams were opened in a single day. Nick had 36 men working under him; 26 of whom were reputed to have been employed there at least 25 years. Nick called his men "artists" for their skills; many were often offered jobs at other oyster bars across the country but most never left. Michael Scandalios was acting manager and George Jacques, acting assistant manager in the mid 1940s. George was the maître d'hôtel at the famous Algonquin Hotel.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Marshall, pp. 124-26.

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.  
☐ Previously Listed in the National Register.  
☐ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.  
☒ Designated a National Historic Landmark.  
☐ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State Agency  
☒ Federal Agency, National Maritime Initiative, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.  
☐ Local Government

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\_\_\_\_ University  
\_\_\_\_ Other (Specify Repository):

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property:

UTM References:	Zone	Northing	Easting
	A 18	586400	4511600

Verbal Boundary Description:

Manhattan Tax map block 1280, Lot one. Beginning at northeast corner of East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Vanderbilt Avenue running east along East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street for 394.4 feet east; proceed north along Depew Place 340.4 feet north bound; proceed west for 394.4 feet to Vanderbilt Avenue west boundary; proceed south 340.4 feet along Vanderbilt Avenue to East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street.

Boundary Justification:

This needs to be filled in.

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